

Next Issue on Sale December 1

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*Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, Vol. 70, No. 6, Whole No. 409, Dec. 1977. Published monthly by Davis Publications, Inc., at \$1.00 a copy. Annual subscription \$14.00 in U.S.A., \$15.20 in U.S. possessions and Canada; \$16.40 in the Pan American Union and in all other countries. Editorial and Executive Offices, 229 Park Avenue South, New York, N.Y. 10003. Subscription orders and mail regarding subscriptions should be sent to P.O. Box 2600, Greenwich, Ct. 06835. Second-class postage paid at N.Y., N.Y., and additional mailing offices. © 1977 by Davis Publications, Inc., all rights reserved. Protection secured under the Universal Copyright Convention and the Pan American Copyright Convention. ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE® is the registered trademark of Ellery Queen. Printed in U.S.A. Submission must be accompanied by stamped self-addressed envelope, the Publisher assumes no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts.

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a **NEW** detective story by

**JACK RITCHIE**

*Three members of the same jury murdered—sounds like an old gimmick, doesn't it? But murdered by a dead man? And that's only the first of a surprising number of twists, turns, and turnabouts in this Ritchie rib-tickler. Humor-and-homicide—Jack Ritchie's special blend of what might be called "chuckling criminology. . ."*

## **HUNG JURY**

by **JACK RITCHIE**

I had just returned from my vacation and Ralph began filling me in on the case assigned to us.

"Three members of the jury were murdered," he said.

I nodded wisely. "Ah, yes. I see it all. The jury convicted a felon and he swore he would get his revenge."

"Not quite," Ralph said. "Actually it was a hung jury. Four for acquittal and eight for conviction."

"But of course," I said. "So the criminal promptly proceeded to kill three of the jurors who had voted for his conviction."

"Not that either, Henry. All three of the jurors murdered had voted for his acquittal."

"Why the devil would he want to murder three jurors who voted for his acquittal?"

"He didn't really murder anybody, Henry. He couldn't because he was dead."

"Ralph," I said patiently, "if you keep interrupting, I never will get to the nubbin of this case. Start at the beginning."

"Last year," Ralph said, "one Mike Winkler was arrested for the murder of a Jim Hurley. Both of them had long records for breaking-and-entering. They had just finished a job and they got into an argument about how they should divide the loot. Winkler

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pulled a gun and shot Hurley four times, which was enough to kill him. Somebody in a neighboring apartment heard the shots and called the police. They arrived to find Winkler sitting on his couch trying to figure out what to do with Hurley's body. Winkler confessed on the spot that he had killed Hurley and why."

"That should have wrapped it all up."

"Unfortunately, as soon as Winkler got hold of a lawyer, or vice versa, he withdrew the confession. Said he'd been beaten into making it by the arresting officers."

"Was he?"

"No. You know how it is in the department. If one of us does any roughing up, everybody learns about it in time. That doesn't mean that we fall all over ourselves to let the public know. But it's no big secret among ourselves, and nobody laid a finger on Winkler. Anyway, his story was that he went out for a newspaper and when he came back he found Hurley dead and the gun on the floor. But even without the confession, the case against him was still solid as a rock—powder grains on his hands, fingerprints on the murder gun, and so forth."

"But still the jury refused to convict him?"

"It was just one of those things that happen every now and then. You get a balky jury that believes what it wants to believe no matter what the evidence. Maybe it has something to do with the phases of the moon. The jury deliberated for five days without reaching a verdict and the judge finally dismissed it."

"Winkler went free?"

"No. He was taken right back to the county jail while the gears of justice meshed to try him for a second time with a new jury. But there never was a second trial. While Winkler waited, he managed to saw his way out of his cell and steal a car on the street. A squad car spotted him and the chase began. It finally ended when Winkler crashed into another car on a freeway ramp. Both Winkler and the driver of the other car were killed outright."

Faintly I remembered reading about it in the newspapers.

"It happened on the twenty-second of January, this year," Ralph went on. "And now we move on to the twenty-second of the next month, February. One Amos Albee, a bachelor, age thirty-six, accountant, was found hanging by the neck from a rafter in his garage. It was assumed he got onto a chair, slipped the noose around his neck, and then stepped off."

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"He didn't leave a suicide note?"

"No. But then many suicides don't. Albee's background indicated that he was a loner, melancholy by nature, and so it looked like he'd gotten a little more melancholy than usual and decided to end it all. And then exactly one month later, on the twenty-second of March, a Cora Anderson was found dead, also by hanging, in the laundry room of her apartment building. Cora was in her sixties, a widow in bad health, and it appeared that the loneliness of her life and her sickness had gotten too much for her and she decided to end her life."

"I gather that both Cora and Amos were members of the hung jury and that they had voted for Winkler's acquittal?"

"Yes, but at the time nobody connected them in any way. Who's to remember the names of the jurors in any of the dozens of trials going on in the courthouse every month? Besides, we get an average of ten suicides a month."

I alertly grasped the situation. "And then a third juror committed suicide, so to speak, and it took place on the twenty-second of the month following? April?"

"Exactly. Gerald Hawkins, a widower, retired, aged sixty-six, was found hanged in his basement. No suicide note either."

"But now somebody finally got suspicious?"

Ralph nodded. "Jurors get paid for their jury duty, but paperwork being what it is, it wasn't until July that the checks went out in the mail. Nine of them were delivered and accepted, but three of the envelopes were returned, addressees unknown. The City Clerk's office sent a man out to the last-known addresses to talk to neighbors and try to come up with some forwarding addresses. He discovered that all three of the jurors had hanged themselves. It seemed like just too much coincidence, so the City Clerk took the whole thing to the police. That was last week, while you were still on your vacation. By the way, where did you go?"

"Noplace. I stayed home and read and watched the educational channel on television. Also I did some Double-Crostics. Very refreshing and relaxing."

Ralph studied me for a moment and then continued. "We went back to the scenes of the deaths and were able to recover the ropes used on the three jurors—neighbors keep the damnedest things for souvenirs. In our lab we matched the rope ends. In other words, all three of the ropes had come from the same length

or coil." He paused a moment. "You stayed in your apartment the entire two weeks?"

I nodded. "Most people travel on their vacations because they feel guilty about having all that free time and doing nothing. But I never feel guilty about having time off." I pondered the case for a moment. "You said that during his escape attempt, Winkler ran into another car and killed the driver."

"James Bellington. Age twenty-eight. A steam fitter and plumber. Married. No children. He was the only one in the car."

I smiled. "Ralph, if you search Bellington's garage, or basement, I'll wager you will find a coil of rope whose end exactly matches one end of the rope used on the third juror. My theory is that his wife was so traumatically affected by his death that she systematically hunted down every one of the jurors responsible for the—"

"We searched," Ralph said. "No rope. Besides, Bellington and his wife were separated and in the process of getting a divorce. She was minimum sad about his death, especially since she was still his life-insurance beneficiary."

"What about grieving relatives? Brother, sister, parents? Girl friend?"

"None. Bellington's parents are dead and he had no brother or sister. Also no girl friend."

I tried again. "What about the man Winkler shot? Who was unduly affected by his death?"

"Nobody. Hurley ran away from an orphan asylum at the age of fifteen. No relatives and no friends, except for the man who shot him."

I stroked my chin thoughtfully. "And yet it appears that someone has been commemorating the date of Bellington's death by executing a juror on the same day of succeeding months. Clearly someone is saying that if it weren't for the hung jury, Winkler would have been safely stowed in a maximum-security state prison rather than in our flimsy county jail where he had the opportunity to escape and subsequently cause the death of Bellington." I frowned. "Since we cannot find anyone personally devastated by Bellington's death, we must assume that somewhere out there in this city there is a dedicated nut who has taken it upon himself to balance the scales of justice. He could be any one of a million people."

"Possibly," Ralph said. "But on the other hand, looking closer to home, we find that the Winkler jury members were practically at

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each other's throats after five days of deliberation. The eight who voted for Winkler's conviction felt quite strongly that it was a miscarriage of justice not to find Winkler guilty of murder."

I nodded judiciously. "One of those eight jurors must be our murderer."

"We were able to establish that each of the murders must have occurred between ten and twelve in the evening. And if we assume that one person committed all three of the murders, we can eliminate six of the jurors for one reason or another. They have solid alibis for one, two, or all three of the murders."

I rapidly subtracted six from eight. "Ralph, I believe we've narrowed it down to two persons."

Ralph agreed. "One of them is an Elmer Poulos. Age twenty-eight. Physical culture enthusiast. Works in a florist shop at the Mayfair shopping center. The other is Deirdre O'Hennessey. She's twenty-five and has a job as a secretary in a construction firm."

"Ralph," I said, "when we have a chain of murders like this, the murderer's insufferable ego usually impels him to leave something in the nature of a signature at the scene of each crime. Something more personal than just matching rope ends."

Ralph nodded. "Good for you, Henry. After we decided it was murder, we went over everything again with a fine-tooth comb. We found a small cross, about half an inch in size, scratched on the underside of each of the chairs supposedly used by the suicides."

"Hmm," I said. "What kind of cross was it, Ralph? Latin? Lorraine? Celtic? Maltese?"

"Just a plain ordinary cross." He drew one on a sheet of paper.

"Ah," I said. "The Greek cross. Unless, of course, you tilt it forty-five degrees to either the left or the right. In which case, it becomes a Cross of St. Andrew's."

Ralph and I went downstairs to the police garage where we picked up our car and drove it to the Mayfair shopping center. At the florist shop we talked to the owner who directed us to a room at the rear of the store.

We found Elmer Poulos, a muscular young man in a T-shirt, making a funeral wreath.

Ralph introduced me. "This is Sergeant Henry Turnbuckle. My regular partner. He'd like to ask you a few questions."

I nodded. "I will get directly to the point. I understand that you have no alibi for any of the nights of the murders."

He smiled happily. "Absolutely none. I always go to sleep at nine thirty and alone. I have to get a good night's rest so that I can lift the weights."

Ralph studied him. "We think that the murderer first subdued his victims, possibly with chloroform, then put a noose around their necks and hoisted them to the ceiling. Which means that our murderer must be quite a strong man."

"Not necessarily, Ralph," I said. "The murderer could have simply pointed a gun at his victims and ordered them to get on the chair and slip the noose around their necks. Then the murderer kicked the chair away."

"Now, Henry," Ralph said, "I find it hard to believe that his victims would cooperate with him to that extent."

Poulos agreed. "I'll bet that ninety-nine percent of the people on this earth would rather be shot than hanged."

"True enough," I said, "if the victims were absolutely certain they were really about to be hanged. But I suspect that being human and hopeful, they thought that it might just be some kind of bad practical joke and that the best thing to do was to humor the gunholder by cooperating to a point. They would get on the chairs and put the nooses around their necks. Having the chairs kicked out from under them would come as somewhat of a surprise."

Poulos dissented. "Personally I go with the chloroforming and the hoisting."

I regarded him pointedly. "If that was indeed the method used, then you are certainly our most logical suspect."

Poulos beamed. "I don't mind being a logical suspect. Just as long as you can't prove anything. I'm getting a lot of respect around here now. They think maybe I did it. I mean working in a flower shop isn't all that macho and you need all the help you can get."

A thought came to me. "Ralph, Bellington was killed on the twenty-second of January and then on the twenty-second of each succeeding month—February, March and April—another juror was hanged. But why wasn't the *fourth* juror murdered on the twenty-second of May? It was certainly his turn. Why did the murderer stop killing? He still had one more juror to go. And yet the twenty-second of May passed and there was no dead fourth juror. Why? Did the murderer forget his name? His address? Who is the fourth juror who voted for acquittal?"

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Ralph was about to give me the name, but then he eyed Poulos and changed his mind. "The fourth juror is a woman of thirty. Married, with four children, the oldest twelve."

I frowned in cogitation. "Every one of the murdered jurors was single. Alone. In other words their deaths affected no one but themselves. Is it really too much to postulate that the murderer stopped killing because his heart weakened at the prospect of murdering a woman with four minor children?" I turned to Poulos. "Do you like children?"

He thought about that. "Would it be un-American if I said not particularly?"

I cunningly questioned Poulos for another half hour, but gained nothing additional.

When we left Poulos, Ralph drove to an apartment building on the east side. We took the elevator up to the fourth floor.

I glanced at my watch. "Ralph, you said this Deirdre O'Hennessey is a secretary. However, since this is a weekday and therefore a workday, I predict you won't find her home."

"She'll be home," Ralph said. "She's still on her vacation."

Deirdre O'Hennessey had raven hair and extremely violet eyes. She regarded Ralph. "Oh, it's you again."

She let us into her apartment.

I glanced about the room, noticing that she had evidently been working on a Double-Croctic when we rang. I recognized it as one I'd completed several days before.

"Miss O'Hennessey," I said, "I understand you have absolutely no alibi for the nights on which the three jurors were murdered."

She agreed. "None. On the other hand, I doubt very much if I would have had the strength to tie a rope around anybody's neck and hoist him to the ceiling."

I smiled wisely. "We in the department have the suspicion that the hangings might have been accomplished without the need of any strength at all. Do you have a revolver? A threatening weapon of any kind?"

She nodded. "I have a crossbow in the closet. I really don't know what to do with it, but it was on sale and I just couldn't resist it."

I considered the picture. Did she point a crossbow at the quailing? . . .

Deirdre O'Hennessey sat down beside the Double-Croctic. "What is a six-letter word for any of a group of isomeric hydrocarbons of the paraffin series? The second letter has to be a 'c'."

"Octane," I said.

She stared at me for a second and then lettered in the word. She looked up. "I have a question. Three of the four jurors who voted for Winkler's acquittal were murdered. Why not the fourth?"

"We don't know," Ralph said.

I found myself chortling.

They looked at me and Ralph said, "Henry, why are you chortling?"

"Ralph, I know who the killer is."

Ralph studied me and then nodded. "All right, Henry, who is the murderer?"

"Well, I don't actually know his name. But it all reminds me of Jack the Ripper."

Clearly I had their undivided attention.

"Why does it all remind you of Jack the Ripper?" Ralph asked.

I smiled. "Well, Jack the Ripper had a pattern too. He murdered a number of women and then as suddenly as the killings began, they stopped. Why?"

"I give up, Henry," Ralph said. "Why?"

"No one knows for certain, Ralph. But there are a number of theories advanced—that he decided the risk was becoming too great, that he finally saw the error of his ways, that he lost interest, and so on. Anyway, to my mind, the theory which holds the most water is that the killings stopped simply because Jack the Ripper died—by natural causes, disease, accident, or whatever.

"What I am saying, Ralph, is that our killer is dead. That is why he did not murder the fourth juror. You said that six of our jurors had alibis of 'one sort or another.'" I smiled broadly. "All right, Ralph, which one of our jurors is dead?"

"None," Ralph said.

I stared out of the window for a few moments. "On the other hand, it is entirely possible that Jack the Ripper emigrated. People did a lot of emigrating in those days. Perhaps his ship was even lost at sea, which may account for the fact that there were no more Jack-the-Ripper-style murders in America, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand."

Deirdre O'Hennessey had been listening to me, obviously impressed. "Why did the murderer go through the bother of making the deaths look like suicide? Why couldn't he just kill his people and leave it at that?"

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I had the answer, of course. "Because he didn't want the police interfering before his mission was completed."

I lapsed into thought for a few moments and then chortled again.

Deirdre O'Hennessey tilted her head. "Why are you chortling now?"

"It is my theory that the murderer is off his rocker. Ralph, have head X-rays been taken of our suspects?"

"No, Henry."

"Ralph, you must agree that it is a bit unusual for a man to commit three murders for what is basically an abstract, rather than a personal, motive—that is, the desire to achieve justice. Therefore I deduce that the murderer has something wrong with his head and that this accounts for his actions. I believe X-rays are in order."

"I don't know about the legal aspects of that, Henry," Ralph said, staring at the ceiling. "It might be considered an invasion of privacy. At the very least, I think we'd have to get warrants. Why couldn't our murderer be just an ordinary run-of-the-mill psychotic?"

"You have a point there, of course," I conceded. "Or perhaps the murderer has a basal metabolism problem. Or low blood sugar. I rather think that if we X-rayed our suspects, or at least gave them a thorough physical examination, it might prove fruitful."

"What is a five-letter word for unearthly, uncanny, wild?" Deirdre asked.

I pondered. "Weird?"

She nodded. "That's it exactly."

I frowned thoughtfully. Strange. I didn't remember that particular word in the Double-Croctic.

I continued my incisive questioning of Deirdre O'Hennessey for another hour and then Ralph and I returned to headquarters.

Assistant District Attorney Orville Jepson came to our desk. "Well, did you come up with anything new on the dead jurors?"

"Nothing yet," Ralph said.

Jepson is considered to be a brilliant dedicated worker and no one has ever failed to notice his Phi Beta Kappa key.

Ralph spoke to me. "Orville handled the Winkler trial."

The memory of it darkened Jepson's brow. "The only case I ever lost. It made no sense at all. He was guilty as hell and I proved it beyond a doubt."

Ralph tried to be consoling. "Maybe Winkler managed to bribe those jurors."

Jepson shook his head. "No. Winkler was broke. The court had to appoint an attorney for him. Besides, even if he managed to get to the jury, all he needed was to bribe one person. Not four." Jepson glowered. "I just had a stinking jury. No wonder people have no respect for our judicial system. As far as I'm concerned, letting a murderer off is tantamount to being an accessory to the act—or anything that follows."

I nodded. "You mean Benninger's death?"

He corrected me. "Bellinger. Edward Slocum Bellinger."

Something clicked in my mind. "You remember his middle name?"

"Of course," Jepson said. "I have a good memory for names."

I studied Jepson and then smiled thinly. "Let me paint a portrait of our murderer. First of all, he is a perfectionist. He is also extremely brilliant. He must be perfect in everything he undertakes. He cannot endure defeat—even one defeat. And what is more, he believes fiercely in justice. The guilty must be punished. And if this can't be done legally, it must be done extra-legally."

Jepson cocked his head. "Brilliant, you say?"

"Of course. A twisted brilliant mind. He feels that if the guilty are not punished, it is a failure on his part and he must make amends. Now, sir, where were you on the night of—"

Ralph sat up quickly. "How did you like Hong Kong, Orville?"

Jepson brightened. "It was great. We all had a swell time."

Ralph turned to me. "Henry, you *do* remember that Orville took a vacation trip to the Orient with his wife and family. Hong Kong, Honolulu, Manila. The works. And they were gone *all* of April."

By George, he was right.

Jepson nodded. "We didn't get back until the beginning of May. Just in time for the funeral."

"Funeral?" I said. "What funeral?"

"Judge Remsford's funeral. He presided at the Winkler trial. Took the hung jury rather hard too, as I remember. His face got quite livid and he had a few choice words for the jury before he dismissed it." Jepson sighed. "The judge was a fine man. Cut down in the prime of his life, you might say."

"Cut down?"

"Yes. Terminal disease. Began acting a bit erratic. His wife fi-

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nally took him to a doctor. X-rays showed that it was inoperable. Died on the first or second of May." Jepson reflected on the death. "Yes, a fine man. Wilbur Cross Remsford."

Wilbur Cross Remsford?

"Left a wife and three children," Jepson said. He patted Ralph on the shoulder. "Well, keep at it. Let me know if you come up with anything new."

Ralph and I were silent after he left.

Finally Ralph cleared his throat. "Henry, I have the feeling that if we looked in Remsford's garage or basement we'd find a certain coil of rope."

I agreed.

Neither one of us made a move to rise.

"On the other hand," I said, "what would be the point of it all? Remsford is dead. He can't be punished. The only ones to suffer if this came out into the open would be his family."

Ralph and I came to an agreement. The case was officially closed.

Our phone rang and Ralph picked it up. He listened and then turned to me. "She wants to know what's a South African eleven-letter word for a tall acacia on which the giraffe often browses."

That *had* been a difficult one. I smiled. "Kameeldoorn. Literally meaning camel thorn."

Ralph turned back to the phone. "He can't think of the word right now, but he'll have it tonight when he drops in at about seven thirty. By the way, the only thing he drinks is sherry." Ralph hung up.

"Now, Ralph," I said, "why did you tell her I'd be over?"

"Henry," Ralph said, "she didn't go through the jungle of our headquarters switchboard just so that she could find out what some giraffe—" He stopped and smiled. "Henry, we just can't have her calling day and night and disrupting the department. You go over there tonight and give her all the words you've got."

Deirdre had a bottle of sherry waiting when I arrived that evening.

"Q"